



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Phone: (703) 351-7676

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Mr. Charles W. Maynes
Editor, Foreign Policy
P.O. Box 984
Farmingdale, NY 11737

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir:

Normally, CIA does not respond to articles written about it. However, because Allan Goodman's article "Dateline Langley: Fixing the Intelligence Mess" in the winter issue concerns an area of the Agency's activities where we can speak publicly and because the article is so inaccurate, we believe the record should be corrected.

Mr. Goodman left the Agency in 1980, and his information concerning it is seriously outdated. A point-by-point rebuttal of all of Mr. Goodman's errors and recommendations would take too much time and space. Thus, I will only address the most egregious of his inaccuracies:

- Mr. Goodman states that the Intelligence Community does not study its failures and that in the few instances where post-mortems have been undertaken the results are not widely disseminated or discussed.
Fact: In recent years, the Director has assigned a senior group of distinguished officials the task of evaluating not only some fifteen major historical intelligence problems but also has commissioned them to evaluate retrospectively at one and two year intervals virtually every estimate now prepared. Moreover, the Directorate of Intelligence now has its own evaluation staff whose principal function is to do retrospective evaluations of CIA's assessments on particular subjects. Moreover, these evaluations are widely shared with the concerned organizations. Finally, in this connection, one of the Agency's most popular training courses now is a course on intelligence successes and failures.
- Mr. Goodman asserts that analysts learn to be wary of doing longer range or in-depth studies and that the task of writing estimates and think pieces is to be avoided. He notes that most of these studies are turned out by members of a special staff and that promotions

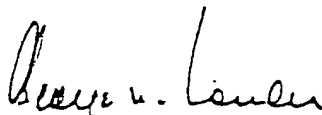
of analysts at middle and senior levels require taking on management responsibility. Fact: In the last 3 1/2 years, a substantial percentage of new analytical resources has been devoted to strengthening long-term research. In the last year alone, more than 700 long-term research assessments were published. Indeed, the structure of incentives has been revised in such a way that it is now more difficult to get analysts to work on short-range projects and current intelligence than on longer-term research. The special staff Mr. Goodman cites has not existed in several years and the Agency now has a number of opportunities for analysts to rise to GS-15 and even to supergrade level.

- Mr. Goodman asserts that the Intelligence Community has few analysts posted abroad and that even short field trips are hard to come by. Fact: One of the benefits of new resources in recent years has been a significant expansion of the number of analysts assigned overseas and, for the first time, there are adequate funds for analysts to travel and work overseas, often for several months at a time. Mr. Goodman's statements that analysts are generally limited to one six-week stretch of temporary duty every three years or so is wrong.
- Mr. Goodman also states that attempts to reach out to academics are strongly resisted and dismissed as cosmetic. Fact: A major initiative on the part of CIA in recent years has been to expand dramatically its contacts not only with academicians but also with think tanks and the private sector. In 1984 alone, some 1200 analysts attended nearly 500 conferences on substantive issues, many of them sponsored by universities. Moreover, analysts are now required to obtain outside training every two years either through academic course work or through attendance at conferences and seminars. A substantial number of our substantive papers are now reviewed by academicians. Particular emphasis is placed on seeking out academicians with a different point of view than our own.
- Mr. Goodman states that analysts should do more to distinguish between what they know and do not know, identify those judgments based on specific evidence from those based on speculation, and make projections about the future. Mr. Goodman further suggests that policymakers should be given some indication of what to look for in the way of events or developments which can be used to test the judgments of the estimates. Fact: One of the principal objectives of new, far more intensive substantive review of CIA analysis is to ensure that our analysts are putting before the policymaker not only a more explicit description of their evidence but also are distinguishing between what is analysis and what is based on evidence, as well as our view of the reliability of that evidence. And when we speculate, the reasons behind our speculation are included. A list of the types of indicators Mr. Goodman referred to is now often included in national estimates and CIA assessments.

-- Mr. Goodman states that the blocking of critical analyses unwelcome to policymakers has been consistent in recent years, citing an estimate on Lebanon as one example. Fact: Not only was the estimate Mr. Goodman cites not blocked -- any more than the one he alludes to relating to Central America -- those estimates delivered an unvarnished, candid Intelligence Community judgment on key issues. No viewpoint was suppressed in the presentation of those reports. The charges of the blocking of critical estimates because they were critical of policy is false; the Agency continues to publish a wide range of estimates without regard to the political consequences for policies that may be affected. In view of the strength of Mr. Goodman's assertion and the centrality of this issue, we would simply note that neither oversight committee of the Congress, which -- unlike Mr. Goodman -- has access to our assessments, has reached his conclusions.

In sum, many of the policies Mr. Goodman advocates with respect to improving the quality of analysis, already have been implemented. While we recognize there is always room for improvement and there are still occasional lapses, the fact remains the policies are in place. And just as Mr. Goodman predicted, these changes in analytical methods and management have reduced the failure rate for American intelligence.

Sincerely,



George V. Lauder
Director, Public Affairs